

## **FUTURE WAR**

### **COMMANDO 21** **AN INCREASE IN COMBAT POWER AND FLEXIBILITY**

**Major H J White Royal Marines  
5 May 2002**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Commando 21 – An increase in combat power and flexibility.

**Author:** Major Haydn J. White Royal Marines.

**Thesis:** The Commando 21 structure increases the combat power and flexibility of a Royal Marines Commando unit.

**Discussion:** After more than forty years of operating using the British Army order of battle, the Royal Marines Command has decided to change the structure of its commando units to a new structure known as Commando 21. The fundamental changes are first the introduction of a Command Company, which is responsible for unit command, communications, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance. Second, the introduction of a Logistics Company to provide the C2 for the units administration and sustainment, and to provide a logistics advisor to the Commanding Officer. Third, the reorganization of the fighting companies to form two Close Combat companies of infantry and two Stand Off companies which provide an infantry support weapon mix. Furthermore, Commando 21 provides a number of more subtle changes designed at harnessing latent potential within the previous orbat.

To determine increases to combat power and flexibility, the Commando 21 structure was considered against the functions in combat. The **Command and Control** function saw an increase in capability particularly with the introduction of the Command Company that provides more robust and flexible C2. Furthermore, the re-allocation of previous Commando level assets to the fighting companies promotes decentralized execution and, by so doing, assists with command. The **Manoeuvre** function has been enhanced by the creation of a fourth fighting company. This provides the commando two infantry companies and two infantry/support weapon companies. The introduction of the principle of four allows a commando to echelon in addition to providing a firebase, assault element and a dedicated reserve. This provides an increase in combat power and flexibility but, the lack of symmetry in the fighting echelon, means that care must be taken to ensure that the appropriate capability is assigned the appropriate tactical task.

The **Firepower** function has also been enhanced by the reorganization of the fighting companies and particularly with the introduction of the Stand Off Combat Companies. This considerable increases the suppressive capability of the forward echelons with only a slight decrease in the number of infantry. **Protection** is a difficult function to address for light infantry. However, limited enhancements have been achieved through the protected mobility of the Viking vehicle which will be used for C2 nodes and weapons platforms. Good training remains the best method of servicing the protection function. **Information and Intelligence** has been addressed and enhanced by Commando 21. The core information and Intelligence assets and mangers are now grouped together within the Command Company, which allows for a more efficient structure to support the commander's decision making. Care must however be taken to ensure that this function is not stove piped as it must remain a whole unit responsibility.

The **Combat Service Support** function has been enhanced through the development of the Logistics Company. This combines barracks administration and field sustainment elements together in one organization to provide a more effective and efficient service. In addition the introduction of a logistics advisor to Main Headquarters is a significant improvement.

In addition to considering Commando 21 against the functions in combat, its **Flexibility** was also considered to determine how the structure would cope with the myriad of potential modern day missions. Again, the new structure was considered an improvement particularly through its emphasis on task organization and modulization.

**Conclusion:** The reorganization to the Commando 21 structure does not provide an epiphany for Royal Marine Commando units. It does, however, serve to streamline some of the latent potential within the previous orbat and provides a robust and flexible task organized structure that enhances overall combat power and flexibility.

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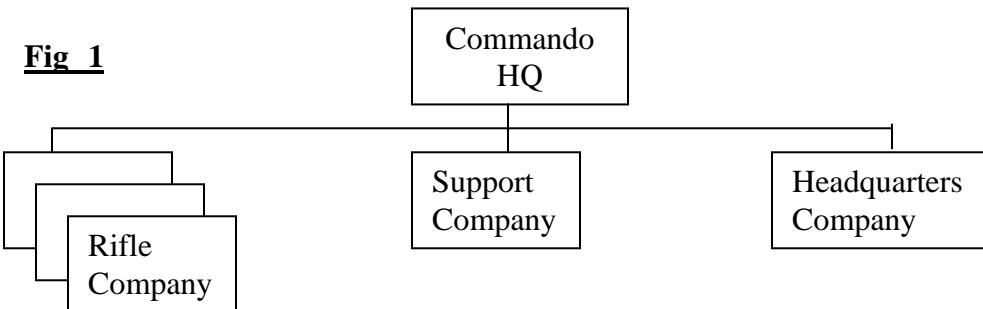
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## **INTRODUCTION**

After thirty years of operating utilising the British Army order of battle (orbat), the Royal Marines have decided to restructure their Commando units to an organization known as Commando 21. This paper will demonstrate that *the Commando 21 structure increases the combat power and flexibility of a Royal Marines Commando unit.*

### **The Background**

Since the 1960's, Royal Marine Commando Units have operated using the British Army orbat comprising three Rifle Companies of foot mobile infantry, a Support Company of specialist weapons and skills, and a Headquarters Company containing the command, sustainment and administrative elements (see Figure 1 and Tab A).

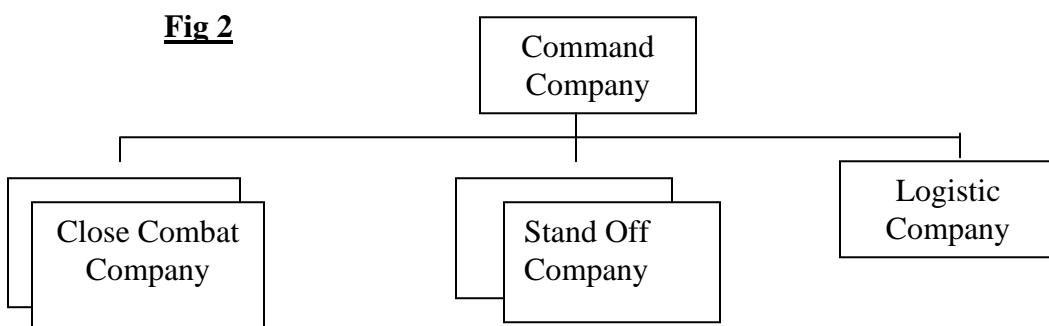


This orbat was adopted by the Royal Marines as it facilitated an easy roulement, and increased interoperability with British Army units within the United Kingdom's Operational Tour Plot (OTP).<sup>1</sup> In addition, the overall strength of the Commando was set at 682 (all ranks) for the very simple reason that this was the number of embarked force berths available on the Commando carrying ships of the time. Since then, minor changes have occurred with the introduction of replacement weapon systems, however, the basic structure has remained the same. During a recent Corps study period sponsored by

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<sup>1</sup> The OTP is the Ministry of Defence system of management for fulfilling defence commitments such as Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, ceremonial duties and the like. It details which unit will fulfill which function and for how long.

Headquarters Royal Marines (HQRM), it was decided that maritime factors, rather than army orbats, should be the driving influence behind Royal Marines Force Structure. This is particularly relevant in light of the introduction of the new naval concept known as the Maritime Contributions to Joint Operations (MCJO).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, new equipment programs, training requirements, and visions of future operations necessitated a reconsideration of the old orbat. Therefore, HQRM tasked the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to conduct a study of potential future orbats and provided them with the parameters and assumptions necessary for their work.<sup>3</sup> The DERA study ultimately concluded that there is no single orbat suitable for all types of operations and that the myriad of operations and missions a Commando unit may undertake will require internal task organization. This is certainly nothing new as task organizing and adopting manning priorities has been a part of a Commando unit's life for sometime. Notwithstanding this, the study did identify a structure that it considered best suited to meet the demands of Commando unit's potential commitments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (see Figure 2 and Tab C).



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<sup>2</sup> MCJO seeks to harness the characteristics of maritime forces in support of expeditionary land campaigns. It also promotes forward deployment in a similar manner to the US Amphibious Ready Group concept. If fully achieved, sustaining the ARG will be a considerable commitment for 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and therefore MCJO becomes the major driving force vice the OTP.

<sup>3</sup> The assumptions and parameters for the study are listed at Tab B.

The fundamental changes to the Commando structure were threefold with a number of additional, more subtle changes. First, the introduction of a Command Company that will be responsible for unit command, communication, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR), and will have both direct and indirect unit manoeuvre support functions. Second, the creation of a Logistics Company to manage the unit's administrative and logistic activity as well as providing a logistic advisor to the Commanding Officer. Third, and perhaps of most significance, the creation of a fourth fighting company in order to introduce the principle of four. This now provides each Commando unit with two Close Combat Companies and two Stand Off Combat Companies in the fighting echelon.<sup>4</sup> So, how does Commando 21 increase combat power and flexibility? An examination of the structure using the six functions in combat provides an excellent method to gauge the effect on combat power and flexibility.

### **ENHANCEMENTS OR LIMITATIONS TO COMBAT POWER**

#### **Command**

The first function to consider is that of Command, which is defined as the exercise of military authority by a designated commander for the planning, direction, coordination and control of a military force.<sup>5</sup> Initially, the establishment of a Command Company would appear to specifically address and empower this function. However, this appears to be little more than a change in nomenclature which binds the old structures of the Main, Tactical and Step-up Headquarters under a new banner. As proposed, it does not appear to provide any technological increase to a Commando's ability to command

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<sup>4</sup> The Close Combat Company closely resembles the old Rifle Company and comprises three Rifle troops and a small manoeuvre support section. The Stand Off Company is an infantry/support weapon mix and comprises one Rifle Troop, one Anti-Tank (ATK) Troop and one Heavy Machine Gun (HMG) Troop.

<sup>5</sup> Army Field Manual, Volume 1 – Combined Arms Operations- Part 2- Battlegroup Tactics, 1998.

and control. It does, however, provide a number of subtle changes more in line with streamlining the command potential which was latent within the old structure. The first of these changes is that the new structure delineates between battle commanders, like the Commanding Officer, and battle managers, like the Commando Second In Command (2IC). This relationship has been developed over the last five years. Its catalyst, in part, was the battlefield redundancy of the Commando 2IC who had become somewhat of a barracks and budget officer. The new structure formalizes this relationship of commanders working from Tactical Headquarters and Managers/Controllers working from Main Headquarters. This provides a far more robust system of command in which the command load is spread across the various headquarters. Furthermore, the spread of responsibility provides greater longevity to the command function. An example would be when units exercise high intensity operations for a limited period, such as a five-day TESEX, the effects of sleep deprivation for commanders is seldom fully addressed or even recognized and yet has a significant effect on unit performance over time.<sup>6</sup> In addition, deputies to functions are also identified in the new structure for example; the Command Company commander is the second watch battle manager in order to provide a relief to the 2IC. This again provides a more robust and flexible function.

In addition to the development of the Command Company, Commando 21 also addresses the command function by its promotion of manoeuvre warfare. This can be seen in two ways. First, the disaggregation of the majority of what used to be perceived as Commando level assets to the fighting companies promotes the manoeuvre warfare tenet of decentralized execution. It could, of course, be argued that such a change

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<sup>6</sup> TESEX stands for Tactical Engagement Simulation Exercise. This is a force on force evaluated exercise and is considered the best training opportunity within the UK.

abrogates the commando level fight, and consequently the command of such precious combat support assets. A better argument perhaps is to consider the new structure as providing the means for sub-units to task organize with the capability of establishing all arms teams at the manoeuvre company level. In addition, it formalizes the command relationships. For example, medium range crew served weapons such as Milan are frequently intermingled within a rifle company's boundary and yet no formal command relationship is in evidence. Of course, where the situation dictates, there is nothing to prevent the Commanding Officer brigading certain assets i.e. reconstitute a complete Heavy Machine Gun Troop.

I contend that the Commando 21 structure therefore enhances the Command function in two main ways. First, by the developing of the Command Company which serves as a vehicle for making a more robust and flexible command architecture, and second, by promoting decentralized execution which can increase combat power.

### **Manoeuvre**

The second function in combat is manoeuvre. Manoeuvre is principally the function of movement and firepower used to gain a position of advantage relative to the enemy.<sup>7</sup> The firepower element of this equation will be discussed later as a separate function. However, in terms of movement enhancements or limitations, the Commando 21 structure fundamentally changes unit ratios from the rule of three (i.e. three manoeuvre (Rifle) Companies each of three rifle Troops), to the principle of four (i.e. four manoeuvre Companies (two Stand Off companies comprising one troop of infantry, one troop of Anti-Tanks and one Troop of HMG, and two Close Combat Companies comprising three Troops of infantry and a manoeuvre support section)).

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Part of the genesis for this change was to increase the manoeuvre capability from the rule of three in which at a Commando or Company could, suppress, assault and maintain a dedicated reserve, to the principle of four where the ability to echelon is added. Obviously this has advantages in delaying the culmination of a tactical evolution as well as providing the Commander the ability to maintain momentum by reinforcing the Main Effort through committing his echelon. However, the principle of four appears to breakdown as the structure at the commando level appears to be more a rule of two Close Combat companies and two Stand Off companies. At the company level it is the rule of three and a half as only a fairly limited manoeuvre support section has been added. This simple criticism fails to recognize that inherent in the principle of four is the grouping of four troops appropriate to that commanders mission. A simplistic example in the offence would be positioning the overwatch company as a suppressive Supporting Effort while attaching its infantry troop to the Main Effort assaulting company. Such a capability to internally task organize is inherent within the Commando 21 structure and philosophy. Although this provides the principle of four at the company level, at the commando level it still appears to be a principle of two and two. However, notwithstanding the difference between a Close Combat and Stand Off Company, they are both manoeuvre elements within the fighting echelon allowing the principle of four to be utilized, particularly when coupled to a willingness to task organize for the myriad of potential operations that a Commando may undertake.

The addition of a fourth manoeuvre element to a Commando does therefore increase its manoeuvre capability and consequently its combat power and flexibility. The

particularl enhancement is the addition of an echelon force, however, due regard will need to be given to ensure the correct capability is applied to the correct tactical task.

### **Firepower**

The third function in combat is firepower. The primary role of firepower is to facilitate manoeuvre by shattering the enemy's will or undermining his cohesion.<sup>8</sup> As alluded to earlier, this function has been addressed by the greater allocation of what were previously Commando support weapons to the manoeuvre company level. In addition, a complimentary range of weapons has been introduced/reintroduced at the troop level to provide a spectrum of capabilities from anti-personnel to anti-armour to anti-material. Commando 21 also facilitates thinking of the use of firepower as manoeuvre support. Previously, the infantry direct fire and movement support was provided Rifle Company to Rifle Company or Rifle Troop to Rifle Troop. Unfortunately, Commando support weapon assets were less than fully integrated due to chain of command, communication weaknesses and the like. These shortfalls, coupled with the poor investment in infantry weapons, have denuded the suppressive capability of the manoeuvre companies. Commando 21 promotes a far greater emphasis on crew-served weapons that provide the commando greater capability to suppress an enemy in order to generate movement. This ability to immediately suppress provides considerable firepower and flexibility enhancements in gaining the initiative in the earlier stages of any action, and may well be the critical element in seizing the initiative for decisive action. Criticism of this allocation could argue that penny packeting support weapons reduces any massing effects of fires. Albeit this may have an element of truth, forward deployed weapons offer a better solution than valuable assets not being committed to the fray until too late. Specifically,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the solution proposes the movement of the majority of direct fire support weapons, namely the Heavy Machine Gun and the Anti-Tank Guided Weapons to the fighting companies. The 81mm mortars as an indirect fire support weapon remains at the commando level. In addition, the new structure also provides a manoeuvre support section comprising light mortar, Long Range Large Caliber Rifle and General Purpose Machine Gun with each infantry troop.

The emphasis towards crew served weapons obviously comes at a price of bayonets, something that would have been an anathema in years gone by. However, a quick study of the numbers indicates only a slight reduction from nine Rifle Troops to eight Rifle troops. This is a fair trade considering the measurable increase in organic firepower to the companies.

### **Protection**

The fourth function in combat is protection. Protection preserves the fighting potential of a force so that it can be applied at a decisive time and place.<sup>9</sup> As light infantry, commando units have very limited protection and have relied on high skill levels and focused training to offset this weakness. Such training will obviously need to continue within the new structure. However, additional equipment has been included to enhance combat power and flexibility. Of particular note is the introduction of the All Terrain Vehicle (Protected) known as the Viking. Three types of vehicles have been procured to provide C2 nodes, protected mobility and repair and recovery. Commando 21 will see one Stand Off company and one Close Combat Company with tracked vehicles with the other two companies operating with wheeled vehicles.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid,

The limited amount of Vikings procured will not allow for a complete replacement of the tracked companies' vehicles. However, it will provide a significant enhancement to protection in some areas. Furthermore, an additional structure containing company of Vikings to be used as a battlefield taxis is currently under review.

Trials of the Viking have shown that it provides a significant increase to the protection function for the fighting echelon. Notwithstanding this, a commando unit remains light infantry and must operate accordingly. Risk taking or operating out of a commando's capability range due to a misunderstanding over the capabilities of protected mobility may serve to decrease the protection function. Also, the addition of another fleet of complex vehicles will require increased first and second line support, and an increase in strategic lift for deployments.

Finally, some of the environments the commandos will operate in will not always suit the use of vehicles. As such, units must continue to train in the truly light role in which training and skill levels remain the greatest enhancement to the protection function.

### **Information and Intelligence**

The fifth function in combat is information and intelligence. Accurate and timely intelligence is fundamental to the success of all operations and can be defined as the organized efforts of a commander to gather, analyze and distribute information about the enemy and the operational environment.<sup>10</sup> We aspire to achieve information dominance and tend to expect information and intelligence to be passed in a timely manner from higher headquarters. This fails to recognize that a Commando's own assets collect the majority of information within its area of influence, and act on that information

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

accordingly. Commando 21 has attempted to focus the management of these resources and their link to the commander's decision making process. It sees the information and intelligence function being managed by the Command Company within which the signals, reconnaissance, intelligence and unit level surveillance elements reside. This will provide a C4ISR structure to the Commanding Officer under the direct management of the Command Company commander with responsibilities for RISTA management and information operations in addition to being the 2<sup>nd</sup> watch battle manager to relieve the 2IC.

The establishment of such new relationships is a sound method of controlling the collection plan and supporting the commander's decision making. That said, care must be taken not to place an additional stage in the processing of information, i.e, the IO through the RISTA manager through the battle manager to the CO. Information must be timely if tempo in decision making is the desired consequence. Equally, the collection plan is a Commando wide responsibility and the potential to be stove piped within the Command Company must be avoided. Finally, the information and intelligence a commander receives is unlikely to be perfect. As such, the Command Company commander is responsible for managing the Decision Support Template (DST) of the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) as well as the RISTA assets. This is a key link that must be emphasized to fully exploit the potential of the Command Company and its management of information and intelligence. If done well, it will be a significant enhancement to combat power and flexibility.

## **Combat Service Support**

The last function in combat is Combat Service Support (CSS). CSS sustains the deployed force and has a critical influence on the tempo, duration and intensity of all operations. Commando 21 provides two significant innovations in this area. First, it ratifies and clarifies the role of the Commando Logistics Officer (CdologO). This role is fulfilled by the Logistics Company commander who will function from Main Headquarters and has become a key member of the Commando Headquarters planning team. Previously, this role was fulfilled by the Quartermaster from B Echelon and, as such, he was displaced from the Main Headquarters and its management of the Commandos' logistics. Furthermore, he was frequently unavailable for planning or advice due to his requirement to attend Quartermaster's meetings and boards at Brigade Headquarters.

Without doubt the introduction of the CdologO is a significant improvement in the control of the Commando's logistics. In addition, the Logistics Company also serves to streamline the sustainment ability of the commando. This now sees the elements that form A and B Echelon; namely QM troop, ES, troop, Medical troop, MT troop, Imprest and Records, and the Messes, grouped together for both barracks administration and deployment. A frequent problem with these elements is that they have insular and busy barracks functions and thus degraded training opportunities as field echelons. Now, being of one company, this has, in part, been addressed.

Two further areas require addressing within the structure if CSS is to be truly enhanced. The echelons must remove the habitual relationship between Company Technical Quartermaster at A Echelon and a manoeuvre company. Although this

provided advantages in terms of loyalty, it did nothing to increase tempo on the battlefield. Developing universal Technical Quartermasters who carry generic loads for immediate replenishment to the manoeuvre company in most need would best do this. This would also provide a more efficient method of surging logistics and supporting a Main Effort. For this to become apparent, a significant enhancement is needed in the lift capability of both A and B Echelon and particularly with the increased emphasis on crew served weapons and vehicle platforms and the associated increases in ammunition, spare parts and POL.

The Commando 21 changes in the form of the CdoLogO and Logistics Company are an improvement to the existing Combat Service Support function and enhance combat power and flexibility accordingly. However, further enhancements need to be made if the tempo of sustainment is to match the tempo of the fighting echelon.

### **Flexibility**

Thus far I have considered the Commando 21 structure in terms of how it affects combat power by analysis of the six functions in combat. To meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the new structure must also have considerable flexibility so that it provides utility throughout the myriad of missions that a Commando unit may undertake.

As stated previously, Commando 21 can be considered a pre-task organized force which emphasizes combined arms company teams, with the capability and philosophy to task organize. This, coupled with the inherent modulisation with troops moving from company to company to enforce the principle of four, does provide considerable flexibility and, perhaps more importantly, the mindset to take advantage of flexibility. Of course, such a mindset will not change a Commando unit into anything more than a

specialized light role battalion, but it will provide it utility throughout the spectrum of conflict.

The key to flexibility is training. The increased reliance on equipment may be of some detriment to such training time due to equipment husbandry. It remains imperative that all members of a commando unit retain a high level of light infantry skills as this increases inherent flexibility, i.e., reorganizing the anti-tankers to infantry due to no tank action or forming a tank hunting party from a spare capacity in B Echelon.

### **Conclusion**

The structure of a Royal Marine Commando unit has long been an emotive subject to members of the Royal Marine Command and will no doubt continue to be so. The HQRM study did not find the old structure redundant and could not provide a new structure suitable for all potential missions, whilst adhering to the provided assumptions. It did, however, offer the Commando 21 structure as a change that sought to utilize some of the latent combat power already held within the organization.

The new structure focuses the Command of the unit through the establishment of a Command Company. This company contains the field Headquarters, and those elements such as the RISTA assets that assist the commander with his decision making. Furthermore, it identifies commanders and controllers along with nominated deputies in order to provide a more robust command structure. The disaggregation of some of the commando level weapons to the manoeuvre companies could be a limiting factor to their command. However, it should be considered nothing more than a form of preemptive task organization.

The Manoeuvre function has been addressed by instituting the principle of four in place of the rule of three. Fundamentally, this allows the commando to echelon as well as suppress, manoeuvre and maintain a dedicated reserve. Furthermore, the principle of four, allows for the support of the Main Effort through the movement of troops, and through the reinforcement of any success they may achieve.

In order to generate this manoeuvre the Firepower (Manoeuvre Support) function has been addressed by the allocation of commando level direct fire weapons to the sub units in order that they be brought to bear more quickly, and provide greater suppression in the initial stages of a firefight. Also, rifle troops now have the addition of a manoeuvre support section which although limited remains an enhancement. This greater commitment to crew served weapons is at the cost of one rifle troop, but the greater suppressive capability far outweighs any reduction in bayonets.

The Protection function remains difficult for light infantry to improve. However, the new structure attempts to provide a better level of protection primarily through protected mobility for command nodes and weapons platforms. This undoubtedly increases the protection in certain areas, but it should in no way become a replacement for quality training which is the is the only way to leverage protection as an element of combat power.

Information and Intelligence has been addressed by Commando 21 within the Command Company and seeks to streamline the intelligence cycle to aid the commander's decision making. However, care must be taken however not to make the management of information and intelligence a closed shop as it needs to be maintained as

a whole unit function. The Command Company is a good tool to manage this unit wide capability and tie it closely to the DST of the IPB process.

The Combat Service Support function has been addressed by streamlining the current potential with the development of the Logistic Company which will achieve a closer relationship with barracks and in the field sustainment functions. Furthermore, the establishment of the CdoLogO as a permanent fixture within the Main Headquarters, and on the planning team, is a significant enhancement to the Combat Service Support of a unit. Additional enhancements should still be made by developing the universal Technical Quartermaster to generate tempo to sustainment.

Finally, as well as considering the new structure against the functions in combat, flexibility is also important when considering how it applies to the likely missions of the future. This it successfully achieves particularly through its emphasis on task organizing and modulisation.

Royal Marine Commando units remain specialized light infantry. The Commando 21 structure provides no epiphany. However, it is a robust and flexible task organized structure that enhances the overall combat power of a Commando unit and may provide a model for light role battalions of the future.

**Tabs:**

- (A) The Old orbat.
- (B) HQRM assumptions.
- (C) Commando 21 orbat.



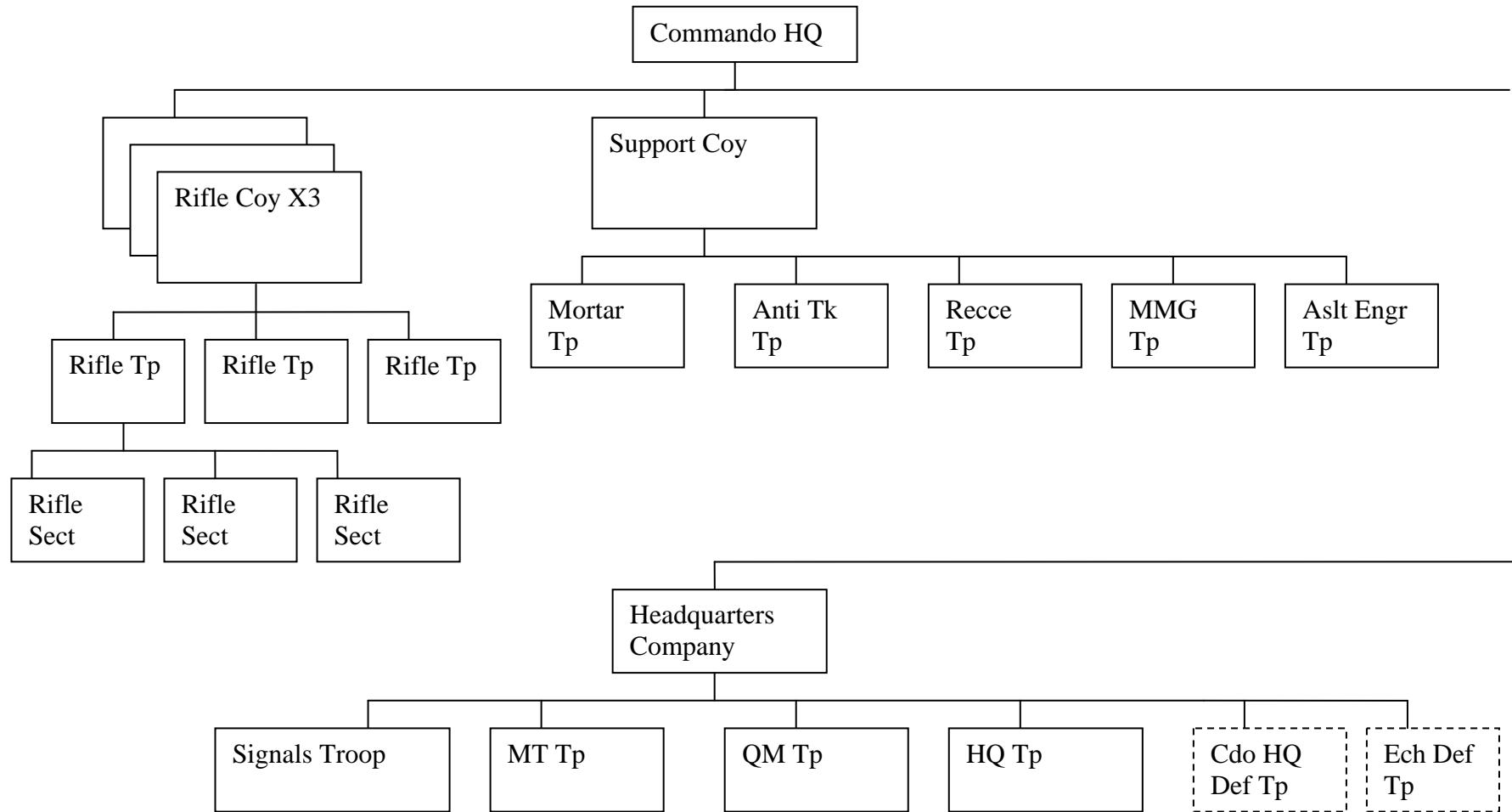
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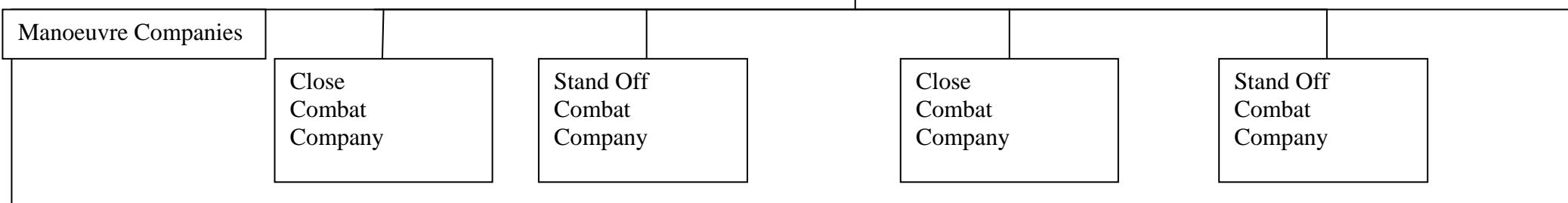
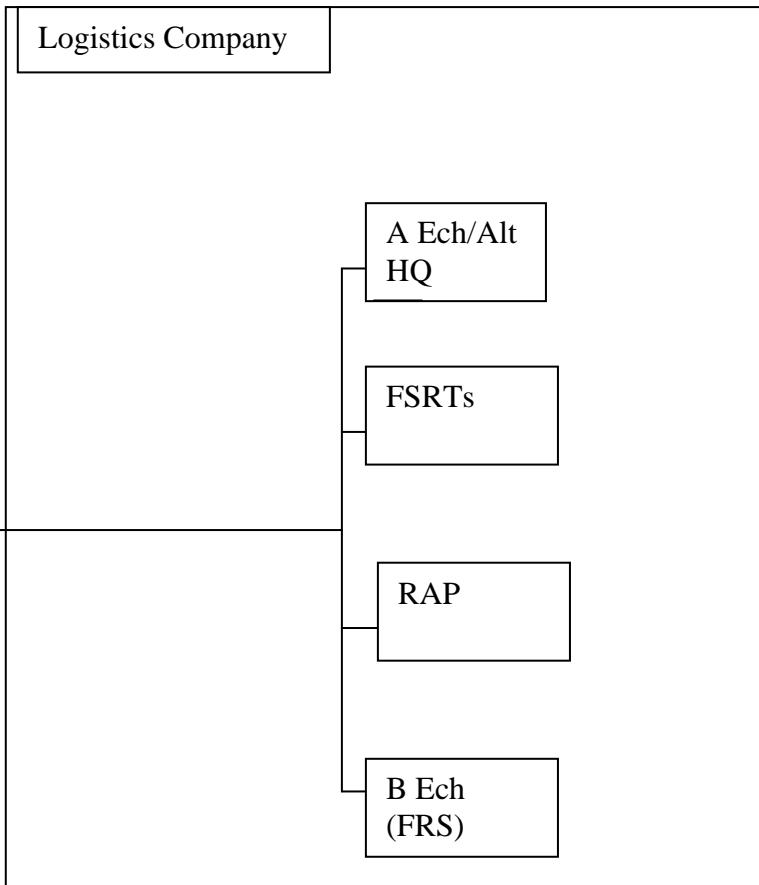
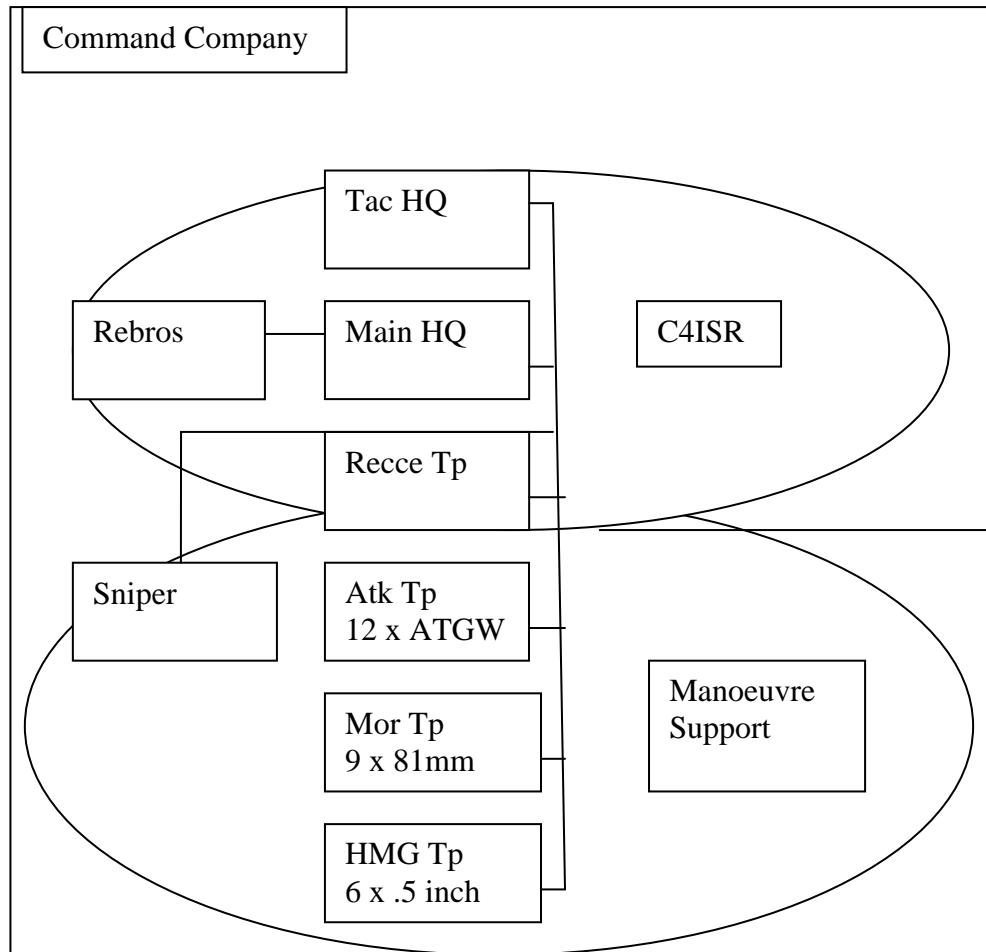
## Previous Commando Orbat



## **HQRM ASSUMPTIONS**

- That manpower resources available to a commando will not increase.
- During normal programming commandos require a generic organization as a basis for force packaging.
- During force packaging and task organization for operations, commandos may regroup modular subunits or re-role sub-units if time permits.
- Changes to the structure must be supportable without additional costs falling elsewhere in the RMC.
- Any manpower costs consequent with the introduction of the ATV(P) and HMG must be absorbed within the current complement.

## Commando 21



## Commando 21

